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ABSTRACT

The conceptualization of the Mars Hill College (MHC) communication major is a type of the refocused, liberal arts-based programs appearing at many colleges and universities around the country--Mars Hill is an undergraduate college of 1100 students. The final product (the liberal-arts based, interdisciplinary MHC communication major) is the result of 3 critical factors: (1) a year and a half of informal, first-hand interviews of university educators who are changing their programs, those who head respected programs, and leading practitioners in communication-related industries; (2) a full year of studying Mars Hill College to get a sense of its character, its mission, its faculty, and its students; (3) the shared vision and enthusiasm of the division head, the dean of faculty and the vice president of academic affairs. The critical quality of "Communication as a Liberal Art" is its function as a context for 21st-century living. The study of communication should help students define and refine daily living and the understanding of it, making possible educated, meaningful information exchange in business, media consumption, message interpretation, leisure, and interpersonal communication. If communication as a meta-perspective is the "new liberal art," it follows that it must be positioned in the academy to be relevant across the academic spectrum. In the last two years, the program at Mars Hall College has incorporated courses from six other departmental disciplines and used a number of faculty from other departments. It also shares computer labs and other resources with other departments. (A list of interdisciplinary programs is attached.) (TB)

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Promoting the Synthesis of Everything: Designing an Interdisciplinary Liberal Arts Communication Major for Undergraduates

Elizabeth C. Michel
Mars Hill College

This past August at the 1995 national convention of American Educators of Journalism and Mass Media (AEJMC), members of "Task Force 2000" presented their final report on the direction communication curriculum must take to be viable into the next century (Washington, D.C., August, 1995). Their recommendations focused on retooling curricula nationwide to reflect the emerging status of the discipline as what Blanchard and Christ call "the new liberal art in the academy." (Media Education and the Liberal Arts: a Blueprint for the New Professionalism," Erlbaum, 1993.) The panel spoke of:

.moving toward a convergence curriculum;

.collaborative faculty teams made up of faculty/staff/ practitioners;

.respect for our discipline and visibility in the academy;

.communication programs as a recruitment tool;

.the importance of defining your mission statement; and

.enhancing analytical thinking across disciplines.

("Task Force 2000," AEJMC, Washington, D.C., August, 1995.)

The terms were familiar.

Just three months earlier I had gone to press with the new communication major at Mars Hill College, where I was brought in 1993 to redesign and coordinate the Communication Program. Mars Hill is an undergraduate, liberal arts institution of about 1100

students just north of Asheville, North Carolina. The challenges I heard in Washington made me want to - yet again - rework our new program, to go farther. But these admonitions also made me proud, because the program we ultimately adopted places communication education at Mars Hill College at the center of this "new professionalism" paradigm.

The conceptualization of the MHC Communication Major is a type of the refocused, liberal arts-based programs appearing at many colleges and universities around the country. The final product is the result of three critical factors:

(1) a year-and-a-half of informal, first-hand interviews of university educators who are changing their programs (i.e. Vernon Keel, Bill Christ, Joe Foot), those who head respected programs (Wick Rowland, Fred Fedler, Mike Meeske, Maurine Beasley) and leading practitioners in communication-related industries (Betsy Plank, Frank Stansberry, Gil Klein, David Bartlett, Joe Treen, Paul McMasters);

(2) a full year of studying our institution in order to get a sense of its character, its mission, its faculty and its students and to enable them to know me;

(3) the professional respect, shared vision and enthusiasm of my division head, the Dean of the Faculty and the Vice-President of Academic Affairs who gave me a mandate to "create a model program for small liberal arts colleges," and then provided the political and logistical support to do it.

A copy of the catalogue description appears in this document. Other papers can address the full concept of our major at MHC and the choice of curricular associations we made. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the interdisciplinary context of the major and its ultimate worth to undergraduate communication and non-communication students.

Communication as a meta-perspective

The critical quality of "Communication as a Liberal Art" is its function as a context for 21st century living. The study of communication should help students define and refine daily living and the understanding of it; making possible educated, meaningful information exchange in business, media consumption, message interpretation, leisure, interpersonal communication and the channels through which those exchanges occur.

Twenty-first century society will overwhelm world citizens with data, correlates, products and quantifiable evaluations and expectations. The person who can manage that data and give it meaning - the individual who comprehends that all communication is ultimately part of a personal dynamic between and among noble individuals, and who promotes and reinforces those patterns which enhance full, democratic communicative competence - will be of profound value to that society.

It is the mission of the Mars Hill College Communication Program to provide that connected quality of educational focus by applying these standards to curricular areas that we can teach well and which meet the needs of the students attracted to this small, liberal and inclusive Baptist liberal arts college.

Communication across the academy.

If communication as a meta-perspective is the "new liberal art," (Blanchard & Christ, 1993), it follows that it must be positioned in the academy to be relevant across the academic spectrum. Our program's size has made us dependent upon other departments, but that interdependence has quickly made us wonderfully inter-related.

Faculty alliances. In the last two years, our small college's program has actively and deliberately incorporated courses from six other departmental disciplines, utilizing the teaching talents of 15 full-time/non-communication faculty, 6 department or division heads, 4 administration/staff people and 3 area communication practitioners. It has also spearheaded two Communication Colloquia, whose purpose has been to illumine major societal issues ("Television and Society, Limitations of the Medium," Quentin Schultze, 1993; "Expanding Freedom of the Press and Speech to Strengthen the Emerging Chinese Socialist Market Economy," Sun Xupei, PRC, 1994) through better understanding of communication as a meta-perspective.

Logistical alliances. The major itself has been built upon the interdisciplinary alliances it reflects. The quality of the program is dependent upon resources generously shared by nearly every department on campus. For example:

.our journalism computer lab is in the science/math building; they schedule communication-only class hours and special journalism lab hours with a lab assistant present (paid with their work-study dollars);

.Social Research Methods, Photography, and Graphic Design faculty have revamped their curricula to address communication concerns; in the latter two areas, department heads and deans have agreed to offer special sections for communication majors;

.the 3-course reporting focus in the Journalism concentration utilizes faculty from political science, philosophy and religion, physical education and English;

."Writing for Electronic & Interactive Media" uses the media center's equipment, studio, etc.;

."Communicating in Business and the Professions" has been given full access to various prime conference room and meeting spaces (media center multi-media room, the President's Conference Room, etc.) so that students can present in environments that parallel those in the corporate world;

.the computer science/math department is currently discussing a second required computer applications course which will have a specialized option for Desk Top for communication majors;

.all department heads from the Fine Arts faculty yielded their Conservatory mentality to accommodate the liberal arts/interdisciplinary concept;

.Graphic Design has been refocused primarily as a course in lay out; faculty have been supported for retraining in computer graphics;

.we are related to, but do not sponsor, the four media outlets on campus;

.we share graphic design computers with the art and theatre departments, who, before I was hired, received state-of-the-art computer labs from Title III monies; and

.administration serves as communication faculty; i.e. the new Director of Public Relations will teach the new Introduction to Public Relations course. (She is also the advisor for the school paper.)

It is my hope that - within five years - Communication courses will be central to our liberal arts program at Mars Hill - through the major and its interdisciplinary specializations, the core curriculum as a minor to complement other disciplines (ex. leadership program, business, the arts,

sports management, etc.) and eventually as part of the general education requirement for graduation. I am on a committee established this year to find tangible ways to promote/enhance communication across the curriculum.

The major.

The communication program at Mars Hill College is organized around a 15-hour core curriculum, anchored in the study and practice of societal and interpersonal communication dynamics which cross its four specializations and their real world applications: Journalism and Writing, Corporate Communication, Computer Communication and Arts Management.

The core courses (Fundamentals of Interpersonal Communication, Mass Media and Society, Communication Theory, Writing for the Mass Audience and Speaking in Business and the Professions) have been deliberately designed to share in the program's mission as well as that of the college as a whole. The following concepts anchor and unite these core courses. All of them are actively and repeatedly related to practice and theory throughout the dynamic of each course...

.counteracting the overwhelmingness of an instrumental society with enhanced communicative competence;

.the concept of the cognitive map;

.establishing a pattern of effective message construction, (both oral and written);

.understanding, actively listening to, honoring and accepting the validity of the logic represented in each of the five philosophical lenses (Idealism, Realism, Neo-Thomism, Experimentalism and Existentialism);

.the effective, deliberate application of the tenets of communication theory to all communication settings, with

actual classroom communication as a constant model of effective application; and

.oral and written discussion held to a standard that actively promotes accessible, considered, justified criticism and commentary (analytical thinking).

Emerging associations.

During the past two years of this program's design, student writing and discussion has begun to reflect a real understanding of the inter-relatedness of the above foundational concepts with both the specialized subject matter and that of other disciplines. Representative samples of that writing from both communication majors and non-majors are attached.

We believe this program benefits our undergraduate students. We believe this kind of undergraduate communication education is of vital importance to our students as citizens of the 21st century; that they will be more aware, stronger and more useful human beings because of what they have learned about the world's and their own roles as thoughtful, educated encoders and decoders of meaningful communication.

INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS

The college offers special programs which cross division and department lines. Students may major in Communication or International Studies, or they may complete a minor in Regional Studies. These programs are described below; for course descriptions not given here, please consult the appropriate section in the academic divisions of this catalog.

COMMUNICATION

Dr. Elizabeth C. Michel, Coordinator

Over 50 percent of all jobs in the next century will be communication-based. How can undergraduate communication education best prepare students for this future demand? According to 1994 consultations with top business- and media-related communication professionals, the market will need graduates who can interpret the 21st century to its society. A panel of these practitioners argued that pre-professional undergraduate programs which emphasize technical experiences will not produce the writers, communicators and thinkers society will need. Even if they could, the technology through which that communication will flow is evolving so rapidly that it is five years outmoded the day it is installed.

The critical need is for graduates who are computer literate and can reason, adapt to, and articulate 21st century information. Communication professionals declare the vital need for people who can write, who have solid interpersonal communication skills, and who understand the world about which they communicate, individuals possessed of a strong, oral- and writing-based liberal arts education. This program reflects that emphasis.

Graduates of this program are prepared for 21st century careers in a variety of areas: corporate communication, journalism, marketing, public relations and management across the full spectrum of applications to business, the media, the arts, computers, religious organizations, etc.

Communication majors may take full advantage of new computer labs in graphic design, layout, and publishing. The curriculum incorporates access to CNN NEWSOURCE, the daily raw video and print feed from CNN, so students have the opportunity to work with breaking national/international news.

Students majoring in this program are guided in their choice of General Education requirements. All communication majors must take a group of courses intended as a foundation for study in the major. Each student then selects one of the following concentrations (groups of specialized courses, including a full-semester internship of 6-12 semester hours credit, which focuses on a particular area of professional interest): **Journalism and Writing, Corporate Communication, Computer Science,** or **Arts Management.**

GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENTS — Inclusion of the following as part of the Gen Ed requirements: Choice of SOC 111, PSY 111 or PS 111; an approved computer science/applications course; EST 320 (Ethics, Science and Technology); ART 227 (Basic Photography).

BASIC MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

COMMUNICATION MAJOR COURSES

- COM 200 – Mass Communication and Society
- COM 220/ENG 220 – Writing for the Mass Audience
- COM 231 – Introduction to Public Speaking
- COM 300 – Communication Theory
- COM 331 – Speaking in Business and the Professions

PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENT: Each student majoring in communication must present an acceptable portfolio of his/her work during the semester immediately prior to the beginning of the senior year. This portfolio (which will include videotapes, audiotapes, published articles, scholarly papers, etc. produced during course and lab work) will be reviewed by a committee of communication faculty and professionals. This committee will evaluate the portfolio as acceptable or unacceptable and make recommendations for improvement and advancement during the senior year.

COMMUNICATION MINOR

Completion of the Communication Major Courses listed immediately above (18 credit hours) plus one 300-level communication option.

JOURNALISM AND WRITING CONCENTRATION

REQUIRED COURSES: COM 320/ENG 320 (Newswriting), COM 420 (Writing for Electronic and Interactive Media), SOC 219 (Social Research Methods), SOC 200 (Research Activity), COM 461 (Internship), COM 111 (Communication Lab; 3 credit hours, 1 in each of 3 semesters), completion of the Portfolio Requirement, and ART 209 (Graphic Design I).

SUPPORTIVE STUDIES: A three-course specialization (outside the major) selected from the following reporting areas: Politics/Government, Crime/Family, Religion, Sports Reporting; or Writing. **Prerequisite:** Selection must be made in consultation with faculty advisor and have departmental approval.

PS 216 (The Legislative Process)
PS 218 (The Executive Process)
PS 311 (The Courts and Individual Liberties)

SOC 216 (Social Problems)
SOC 226 (Sociology of the Family)
SOC 416 (Criminal Justice System)

REL 327 (Religion in America)
REL 332 (The Church from the Reformation to the Present)
REL 334 (Contemporary Christian Thought)

PE 221 (History and Principles)
PE 330 (Physiology of Exercise)
PE 333 (The Sociology/Psychology of Sport)

ENG 354 (Language and Popular Culture)
ENG 440 (Composition Theory and Practice)
ENG — Any approved 300-400 level literature course beyond the Gen Ed requirement.

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION CONCENTRATION

This concentration is the established one for graduates who plan to enter public relations, management, marketing, personnel, etc.

REQUIRED COURSES: BA 351 (Fundamentals of Marketing), BA 336 (Management and Organization), BA 344 (Organizational Behavior), GE 301 (Introduction to Leadership), COM 400 (Introduction to Public Relations), SOC 219 (Social Research Methods), SOC 200 (Research Activity), COM 420 (Writing for Electronic and Interactive Media), and COM 461 (Internship).

COMPUTER SCIENCE CONCENTRATION

REQUIRED COURSES: CS 202 (Computers and Applications, satisfies Gen Ed, MATH 111, or CS requirement), CS 208 (Basic Programming), COM 111 (Communication Lab: 1 credit hour in two different semesters), COM 461 (Internship), and either: CS 224 (Structured COBOL Programming) and CS 234 (Advanced COBOL Programming) or CS 241 (OBJECT ORIENTED PROGRAMMING I) and CS 307 (Introduction to Data Communication).

ARTS MANAGEMENT CONCENTRATION

REQUIRED COURSES: BA 351 (Fundamentals of Marketing), BA 336 (Management and Organization), BA 344 (Organizational Behavior), BA 221 (Introduction to Accounting), COM 461 (Internship), and either COM 400 (Introduction to Public Relations) or COM 420 (Writing for Electronic & Interactive Media).

Specialization in Art

REQUIRED COURSES: ART 405 (Ancient through 18th Century Art History), ART 406 (19th and 20th Century Art History), ART 200 (Art in the Elementary School)

plus

REQUIRED OPTIONS: completion of a 2-course sequence in one of the following areas:

Painting – ART 201 and ART 301
Printmaking – ART 203 and Art 303
Pottery/Sculpture/Ceramics – ART 205 and 305
Photography – ART 227 and ART 329

plus

6 additional hours of 200-300-level ART courses

Specialization in Music

REQUIRED COURSES: MUS 181, 182 (Principal Instrument, freshman), 281, 282 (Principal Instrument, sophomore) plus Sophomore Group Recital, MUS 273 (Beginning Keyboard), MUS 111, 112, 113, 114 (Theory & Aural Skills), MUS 216 (Music Literature), and two Ensembles.

Specialization in Theatre Arts

REQUIRED COURSES: TA 117 (Introduction to Theatre), TA 123 (Introduction to Acting), TA 118 (Introduction to Technical Theatre), COM 111 (Communication Lab, 1 credit hour in each of 3 semesters), and TA 111 (Theatre Lab, 1 credit hour in each of two semesters).

REQUIRED OPTIONS: Two courses from the following: TA 301, 302, 303, 304, 305.

COMMUNICATION COURSES

COM 111. COMMUNICATION LAB (1). Students will actively participate in staff work for campus media such as the student newspaper, the radio station, the yearbook, the student literary/art magazine. Must be repeated in two additional semesters for two additional hours of credit.

COM 200. MASS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY (3). An introduction to the history, functions, processes and effects of mass communication in American society. Prerequisite: Grade of C or better in PSY111 or SOC111 or PS111. Fall.

COM 220. WRITING FOR THE MASS AUDIENCE (3). An introduction to the techniques of writing for the mass audience, including editing, structuring written communication for media consumption, and story/issue analysis. Prerequisites: Grade of C or better in approved computer applications course, junior standing or instructor's consent. Fall.

COM 231. PUBLIC SPEAKING (3). A study of basic speech communication concepts as applied to public speaking. For students wishing to enhance leadership potential by improvement in traditional public speaking situations. Course includes remediation of oral communication anxiety.

COM 261. INTERNSHIP (1-3). An initial exploratory, field-oriented experience enabling the student to attain certain specified learning goals in a work-related environment.

COM 300. COMMUNICATION THEORY (3). Emphasizes different established theories of interpersonal, nonverbal, and persuasive communication and the historical development of mediated communication. Prerequisites: A grade of C or better in SOC 219 and in PSY111 or SOC111 or PS111, or instructor's consent. Spring.

COM 320. NEWSWRITING (3). Hones basic journalistic skills to effectively communicate with various audiences. Students analyze, conduct and compose surveys, polls, investigative reports, interviews, features and other specialized forms of newswriting. Prerequisites: A grade of C or better in COM 220, COM 200, SOC 219 and COM 231, junior standing or departmental consent. Spring.

COM 327. SPECIAL TOPICS IN COMMUNICATION (3). Options for students to study, according to their interests, a variety of topics not covered in regular courses.

COM 331. SPEAKING IN BUSINESS AND THE PROFESSIONS (3). Further study of public speaking and small-group concepts as they apply to the business and professional person. Emphasizes public presentations, group leadership, and effective interpersonal business communication. Prerequisites: A grade of C or better in COM 231 and COM 211 or department consent. Fall.

COM 400. INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC RELATIONS (3). An introduction to the theory and practice of professional public relations. Examines the PR dynamics of targeted persuasions, public opinion, and specialized PR writing formats. Prerequisites: A grade of C or better in COM 200, COM 220, COM 300, or instructor's consent. Spring.

COM 420. WRITING FOR ELECTRONIC AND INTERACTIVE MEDIA (3). Learning to convert solid newswriting technique to the more consolidated demands of TV, radio, advertising and interactive media. Studio experience in the basic principles of video production, including operation of studio equipment and accessing CNN NewSource raw video and print newsfeed. Prerequisites: A grade of C or better in COM 220 (and COM 320, where required), junior standing or departmental consent. Fall.

COM 457, 458. DIRECTED READINGS (1-3). Independent readings. Prerequisite: Consent of the instructor and the department.

COM 460. INDEPENDENT STUDY (1-3). An independent program of study, research, and writing. Prerequisite: Consent of the instructor and the department.

COM 461. INTERNSHIP (6-12). Required full-semester (or equivalent) field-oriented experience enabling

the student to apply pertinent knowledge and skills to specified learning goals in a work-related environment. All internship proposals must be completed with the faculty advisor at least one week prior to pre-registration. Prerequisites: A grade of C or better in all major courses (and COM 320, where required), junior standing, and department consent.

INTERDISCIPLINARY DEPARTMENT COURSES

For descriptions of the following courses which are related to this major see the "General Education" section or the appropriate department in this catalog:

ART 209, 210. GRAPHIC DESIGN I & II (3).
ART 227. BASIC PHOTOGRAPHY (3).
BA 351. FUNDAMENTALS OF MARKETING (3).
EST 320. ETHICS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD (3).
SOC 200. RESEARCH ACTIVITY (1).
SOC 219. SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS (3).
TA 211. VOICE AND DICTION (2).

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